

## Discourse Analysis: Bulleh Shah's and Rumi's Poetry

Khalid Saifullah

University of Management and Technology- Lahore, Pakistan

### ABSTRACT

The present study aims at analyzing the discourse of Sufi poetry, a prominent genre of Sufi Literature. Sufi poets have been publicizing Sufism and their philosophy through poetry. Text and language is central to Sufi literature therefore Sufi poets use poetic language to mesmerize the hearts of people. In this study thematic discourse analysis of Sufi poetry is conducted in qualitative research paradigm whereas Post-structuralism is used as theoretical framework epistemologically. Textual data in form of poetry verses is collected purposively from online resources. The study concludes that poetry of two Sufi poets, Bulleh Shah and Rumi holds common themes of universal love, purification of soul and humility.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Sufi poetry, universal love, purification of soul, self-development, service to humanity, asceticism, union with God

### Introduction

Sufism has been influencing the spirituality of human kind for a long span of time. The origin of Sufism dates back to Muhammad (PBUH), prophet of Islam and even to the earlier prophets of different religions (Conway, 2006, 1). Sufism fundamentally reflects a pathway that makes a man free from self-pride which leads to the evils of existing world. Sufism also guides a person to how to achieve higher level of spirituality (Dehlvi, 2009, xix). Body holds secondary value in Sufism and it is merely considered the container of spirit that is why soul and spirituality is the primary concern of all Sufis. They emphasize more on spiritual development as compared to any other development. It is a quest for finding the ultimate truth that is God or love of God.

It can be seen as an attempt to seek extreme external and internal purity which characterizes a remarkable state of purification of heart and soul of man. Asceticism or spiritual exercise like meditation, remembrance of God, serving others and humility were the elements of great importance in the initiation of early Sufism (Hanieh, 2011) Sufism eliminates inner wicked desires and buries them deep down in humility in such a way that treacherous desires never return back. Sufism is not confined to a particular dynasty of people,

nation or any religion. It is not restricted to the geographical boundaries of the world. It is a universal tradition which holds all religions in one chain, entertains multiple schools of thought and people of the East and West equally (Lings, 2005, 14). Sufism is neither a separate religion nor a combination of all religions rather it represents religions with distinctive humanistic approach and this tradition shares the essential truth of all the religions. The term essential truth involves common features of all religions like believing in One God, peace and service of humanity.

In Islamic context, Sufism is considered one of the most holistic paths to become a perfect human being and a practicing Muslim in this world and the hereafter (Salleh, 2014, 319). Sufism has been a source of reformation of Muslim mystic scholars for a long span of time. Many religious and social reforms are the result of Sufis' deep influence on the people of subcontinent. The Islamic tradition of Sufism involves "metaphysics, ethical discipline, devotional practices, music, poetry and mystical experiences" (Bruinessen & Julia, 2007, 5). Seeking the consent of Almighty Allah is the fundamental goal of every Sufi and this pleasure is achieved through various physical and spiritual exercises. Universal love for humanity is one of the core subjects of Sufism. Sufism is a sort of practical model of total submission as the holy Quran declares this as an attribute of true believers and prophets of Allah as Quran states, "total submission to the will of God" (Mubarkpuri, 2003, 401). Total submission to God is the destiny and destination of all Sufis. Every Sufi feels the dire need of to be colored in the color of Allah through total submission to the God's will. Sufism consists of eight qualities exemplified in eight prophets. Total submission to God's will is one of those as Hazrat Ismail happily submitted to God's will. (Al-Hajveri, 2001, 40)

Many mystic scholars have been defining the very nature of Sufism through their mystical practices, teachings and literary works. Therefore it is difficult to encompass all the aspects of Sufism in a single definition because of its multidimensional nature in which all aspects are simultaneously important. The greatest Sufi' Imam Al-Ghazali, defines it as "Sufism is all about the progress to great end of self-realization or God realization" (Edson, 2012, 73).

Self-realization is considered the foundation stone of Sufi's journey. Once the first step is taken firmly with faith and consistency, the path to final state God's realization becomes easy and clear. Sufism is the code of heart, purification of soul and the extreme feeling of God's presence. In Ali Al-Hujweri's opinion (990 - 1077 AD), as cited by Alavi (1988), Sufism is all about "self-absence and presence with God". Mysticism or the Muslim term Tasawwuf, [تصوف] according to Shaikh Junayd (830 - 910 AD) is "that your devotion to God is not for any purpose" (Numani, 1978, 24). A definition adopted by Shaykh Sirhindi (1564-1624) is that "Walayah means the effacement (fana) of man in God and his survival (baqa) in Him" (Ansari, 1986: 31 - 33)

Sufism has very rich treasure of multi-genre literature including religious writings, moral and mystic stories and interpretations of Quran and Hadith through poetry and other forms of writings. Few out of prevailing genres achieved immense fame and popularity

among the followers of Sufism. Auto-biographies of mystic scholars like that of Ali bin Usman Al-Hujwery who included the biographical notes of eminent Sufis in his famous book '*The Kashf-ul-Mahjub*' paying them a tribute as the great scholar of Islam is very popular among lovers of Sufism (Mojaddedi, 2013: 133)

Poetry is one of the most prominent genre of Sufi literature. Most of the Sufis have been poets and their Sufi poetry dates back to 10th century AD. Abu Sa'idFazlu'llah bin Abi'al khair (d.1049) is considered the first Sufi poet of mystical poetry. Poetry produced in the early era of Sufism was particularly confined to quatrains or rubaiyat. Quatrain is derived from the French word quatre, means four. It is a stanza of four lines, having alternate rhymes. Mystic poets have been practicing four lines stanza in their poetry such as Rumi, Bulleh Shah, and Omer Khayyam. Sufi poets have been practicing four line verses for the expression of single idea or theme. The quatrains of Umar Khayyam (d. 1124), another mystical poet, gained popularity and also have been translated in English and many other languages. However, during the 12th and 13th centuries Sufi poetry reached its peak with the contribution of Abu'l Majd MajdudSana'i, Fariduddin Attar and Rumi (1207 - 1273). They practiced and invented new forms of poetry including Masnavi, narrative poem. They also composed numerous other couplets or ghazals and quatrains besides narrative poems (Khanam, 2009, 50). These writings mesmerized the hearts of Sufis mysteriously and they have been preaching with the help of Sufi Poetry. Poetry has always been considered the mouthpiece of people's feelings. The fever of Sufi poetry, music and meditation is not confined to subcontinent only but also all these practices have an enormous appeal in the West (Einboden, 2014, 31-33).

Among Sufi scholars and poets, Jalal Uddin Rumi (1207-1273) a man of God, a great teacher of love and peace, writer of books, scholar and a bestselling mystical poet in the West holds a very high rank. Rumi was the author of a vast collection of mystic odes and lyrics in Persian Language. He propagated his whole philosophy through poetry. Rumi had three main texts written in different forms of poetry: the Diwan-i Shams-i-Tabriz (odes), written in the memory of Rumi's spiritual master, the Masnavi and the Rubaiyat (quatrains). All these books have common elements that they all suggest the very madness of divine experience (Nicholson, 2001, xvii).The new wave of enthusiasm for Jalal Uddin Rumi's poetry in America and Europe has brought Sufism to the attention of many liberal western people who misunderstood Islam after the incident of 9-11 (Genn, 2007, 257).It helped people to realize the very nature and message of Islam that is peace and love for all.

Many scholars paid tribute to Rumi and his writings. Since every age has its own language yet the language of Rumi binds together every age. A visionary and mystic poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal was highly influenced and impressed by Rumi's understanding of Quran and Sunnah of Holy Prophet (PBUH).He considers Rumi as his spiritual teacher and calls him a khizar-e-rah or his spiritual guide. Iqbal asserts "My spiritual guide Rumi turned my dust into elixir" (Kidwai, 1975, 72). Rumi was considered as one the primary components which constituted the basis of Iqbal Islamic philosophy. Allama Iqbal has mentioned Rumi

with grate love, respect as a sources of guidance and spiritual master. For Example he says in one of his poems that “Like Rumi I am calling for prayer (azan) in the Haram ...I have learnt the secrets of life from him”(Ishrat, 1990, 40) Rumi has long been recognized as one of the greatest mystical poets of Islam. To others, Rumi is “the most eminent Sufi poet Persia has ever produced” (Nazir, 2009, available at:

<http://islamicspiritualism.blogspot.com/2009/12/why-igbal-regarded-rumi-as-his-guide.html> ).

Moreover, UNESCO celebrated a memorial day on 6th September 2007 to honor Rumi’s 800th birth anniversary (Naikbeen, 2015, available at: <http://www.theismaili.org/rumi-%E2%80%94800th-anniversary>). Rumi was ranked as America’s best-selling poet in 1997 (Ciabattari, 2014, available at:

<http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140414-americas-best-selling-poet>). He was the man of such gifted talent that the people of five religions attended his funeral. Muslims, christens, Jews, Arabs and Turks honored his funeral and that night was titled as ‘Shab-ul-uroos’, night of union of divine.

Although Baba Bulleh Shah (1680 - 1757) did not achieve as much fame as Rumi did, yet he was recognized among the eminent Sufi poets and scholars at national and international level. Bulleh Shah shared same time period of writing of poetry with Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhatai (1689 - 1752), Punjabi poet Waris Shah (1722 - 1798), writer of famous narrative poem Heer Ranjha, and the Sindhi Sufi poet Abdul Wahab (1739 - 1829), better known by his pen name Sachal Sarmast. Bulleh Shah primarily practiced a poetic form kafi, a famous verse form of Punjabi, Saraiki, Sindhi and Sikh poets. His poetry represents his mystical spiritual journey through the four stages of Sufism: Shariat (Path), Tariqat (Observance), Haqiqat (Truth) and Marfat (Union). The beauty and glory of Bulleh Shah’s verse is that it is simple yet very beautiful, it is full of intellect and enriched with feelings at the same time (Krishna, 1973, 73)

World has seen many poets but few of them influenced the world with their mystical philosophy. Rumi and Bulleh Shah were among those few Sufi poets who were not confined to particular age. Universality of their poetry brought immense fame for them, it made them immortal and they will always be alive in the hearts of their lovers (Ménage, & Arberry, 1962, vi, Unher & Bano, 2009, 1).

## **Methodology**

The study is designed to conduct a discourse analysis of commonly emerging patterns of Sufi poetry. It is a matter of discourse analysis to review how Sufi poets use different expressions in their poetry and how they communicate through language. The term discourse refers “both to what a text producer meant by a text and what a text means to the receiver” (Widdowson, 2007, 23) Discourse analysis is a way of interpretation of text in order to construct meaning. Probably there is no specific language which can be called purely literary in nature. Language performs several functions and literariness is one of the functions of language. Interpretation and explanation is a free play of words which falls in qualitative research paradigm.

Qualitative research offers a variety of approaches to interpret a piece of text in order to debunk and construct meanings.

Post-structuralists contributed a lot in debates of production of knowledge epistemologically. Reader replaces the author as primary subject of text. Interpretation of the meaning of a text is therefore dependent on reader's concept of self. Poststructuralists examine cultural norms and traditions among other sources for meaning. Post Structuralism rejects the idea that a literary text has one purpose, one meaning or one singular existence. Rather poststructuralists believe in using a variety of perspectives to create multifaceted interpretation of a text. Post-structuralists are of the view that descriptions and interpretations of text are highly contextual (Radford& Radford, 2005, 39). To them meanings of words are slippery, fluid, changeable and shifty.

To Derrida, a key figure of post-structuralism and the originator of 'deconstruction' theory, "There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 2010, available at <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/jacques-derrida>). Sufi poetry being a literary tradition holds multiple interpretations. It is not confined to single agreed meanings. Poetry is a universal phenomenon, it represents humanity. It has no religion and geographical boundaries. People of different parts of the world read Sufi poetry and interpret it in the context of their culture, beliefs and religion.

### **Data collection**

According to nature and design of the study textual data is collected. Particular poems of two prominent poets of two different languages are selected for thematic discourse analysis. Poems of Rumi, a Persian poet and scholar are taken from his famous work 'Masnavi' and 'Devan-e-Shamas'. Baba Bulleh Shah's poems are taken from different online resources. The required data for discourse analysis is taken from online resources, for example websites, e-books and collection of Sufi poetry.

### **Data analysis**

Poets use text and language as a vehicle to convey their thoughts in a more sophisticated way. Language performs many functions and poetic function is one of them focusing on the message that its text contains in it (Tan, 2012, 628). Thematic discourse of selected poems is the central focus of this study. Careful study of Sufi poetry reveals that Sufis used poetry as their mouthpiece to proliferate their teachings.

In John Donne's words "For love, all love of other sights controls" (Donne, 1988, 75 available at [http://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/john\\_donne\\_2004\\_9.pdf](http://www.poemhunter.com/i/ebooks/pdf/john_donne_2004_9.pdf)), love is the most powerful of the expressions of emotions and feelings. The theme of love /Ishaq/ is commonly found in Sufi poets' writings. Love or Ishaq is not static rather it is a very dynamic state of heart for Sufis. The word love holds many interpretations to Sufis, primarily it is the love of man to God or Divine love. It is universal and it exists everywhere within man and in outer world. In his famous book *Masnavi*, Rumi illustrates the very concept of universal love

in his poetry (Read house, 1880,25) To him a lover's nationality is separate from all other nationalities of religions whereby the only recognition a lover has is the Beloved (God). Rumi sees love as an essential commodity of spiritual life. He presents the very theme of love in many of his poems "love is water of life" (Rumi, 2012, available at <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/poems/love-is-the-water-of-life-mewlana-jalaluddin-rumi-poems/>). Love is a pathway to find God, if a soul does not dip itself down in the water of love it cannot find God.

The same theme is presented by prominent mystic poet Baba Bulleh Shah (1680 - 1757) who sees love as an essential part of human life and preaches that love has no mental or geographical boundaries. Love for Bulleh Shah is a matter of universality regardless of person, time and place as he illustrates in one of his poems: "بر ہر دل ، ہر تھان وچ عشق سما یا اے" "Har har dil, har thaana wicha ishq samaya ay --- Arash Farash tay ishq ne kadam tikaya ay" 'Love is everywhere...love has its place on earth and heavens'(Shah, 2012, available at <http://www.pakistan.web.pk/threads/parh-parh-ilm-kitaban-da-tu-naam-rakh-liya-qazi.31124>).

Love is a form of worship which shares equal value with other acts of worships. To Bulleh Shah, love is ever new and fresh "عشق دی نویں نویں بہار" 'Love is ever new and fresh' (Misali, 2004, 64). Love has no particular season, it is everlasting and all seasons are season of love. The philosophy behind this concept of love is that the essence of all acts of worship is to bring man closer to God and to develop a constant relationship between Allah and man. Sufis assume that closeness of Allah can be achieved perfectly through pure love of Allah.

Purification of soul is another feature of Sufi poetry. Whole Sufism is based on the idea that without losing individual self, one cannot find the universal self. In religious terms as ecstasy affords the only means by which the soul can directly communicate and become united with God (Nicholson, 2007, 23). The aforementioned stage of ecstasy is only achieved through purification of soul and heart and to attain this stage Sufis adopt different modes, physical and spiritual exercises. Rumi emphasized on purification of soul by dipping it into the water of love of Allah to purify it (Yarshater, 1991, 165). Purification of heart and soul removes all grudges and lusts of the contemporary world. When the soul becomes pure, it seeks Allah's pleasure through various mysterious ways. This world seems of no importance for a person whose soul is pure and refined. Bulleh Shah in a quatrain speaks of achieving Allah's pleasure. If a person acquires abundance of knowledge, fights in the way of Allah, visits Makkah and Madinah for performing pilgrimage and receives several titles of Qazi (Judge), Ghazi(Fighter), and Haji(Pilgrim)but if he fails in achieving Allah's pleasure through all these religious experiences, this failure will be considered the major loss. "بلھے تو کی کیتا؟ جے O Bulleh tu ki keeta... je tu Rab na keeta razi" 'Bulleh you achieved nothing... if you fail in making Allah pleased (with you)' "Shah,2004 available at <http://razarumi.com/a-few-poems-by-bulleh-shah>)Pleasure of Allah is what exactly all acts of worship are done for. So Rumi and Bulleh Shah go hand in hand in their themes of poetry.



Sufism consists of different orders and stages, where each has its prerequisites. Some of the Sufi orders are achieved by observing extreme humility, absence of pride, selflessness and serving of others passionately. The term service has several meanings. One should devote one's life to God's service in order to win His favor and please Him. Khwaja Muinuddin, a renowned Sufi scholar laid emphasis on service to mankind. Shaykh Nizamuddin ranks service of humanity next only to the performance of obligatory worship (Khanam, 2009, 67). To Bulleh Shah, absence of pride and self-ego is the solution of all problems of man “بلھے شاہ” Bulleh Shah! Gal taiyon mukdi... jadon ‘Mein’ nu dilon gawaaiye” “Bulleh Shah the ultimate is when the ‘I’ is removed from the heart”. (Shah, 2009, available at <https://sufipoetry.wordpress.com/2009/11/01/makkeh-gaya-bulleh-shah>).

According to Bulleh Shah the ultimate humility is achieved when the ‘I’ is removed from the heart. Removing ‘I’ means removal of personal ego and dissolving it into an ocean of love and service of humanity. Rumi is also of the view that pride is major obstacle in achieving the high position of Sufism. ‘The wine everlasting’, a poem of Rumi presents the same theme of removal of ‘I’ to have a glass of everlasting wine/Is this, to withdraw thy self from the house of pride? (Davis, 2014, 84)

A soul cannot even taste the grapes of Divine light without losing pride and ego. Although Rumi and Bulleh Shah were not contemporary poets but they were seekers of the same truth and both share similarity of themes in their poetry. They represent unity of thoughts, universality of love and humility as pathway of achieving Allah's pleasure which is ultimate goal of all Sufis.

## Conclusion

Sufi literature is a comprehensive reflection of Sufi thoughts and Sufi poetry illuminates the path to reach haqiqat (reality) or the goal of Union with God. The primary goal of every true Sufi is to achieve the state of union with the beloved that is God. This quest of being with God leads Sufis to endless meditations on nature and remembrance of God (Voll & Ohtsuka, available at: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0759>). Although union or annihilation in God is to be fully achieved after death yet it can be gained through following path of Sufis. The poetry of Rumi and Bulleh shah presents common themes of universal love, purification of heart and soul, absence of oneself in universal self, humility and humbleness and ultimate goal to please Allah. Both these Sufi poets lay emphasis on internal change of human being, which is a change of intention, purpose of life, way of living, change of heart and soul. Bulleh shah asserts پڑھ علم تے فاضل ہویا۔۔۔ کدی اپنے آپ نوں پڑھیا نابین پڑھ Parrh parrh ilam fazal hoya / Kadeapnay aap nu parrhaya naeen’ ‘you read to become all knowledgeable... But you never read yourself’ (Shah, 2012, available at <http://nativepakistan.com/sufi-poetry-mystic-sufi-poetry/bulleh-shah-3/>).

One can become a scholar by acquiring knowledge but a real scholar is one who reads and understands his inner self. Quest for perfection, to be closer to God, be alone with Allah, to have an opportunity to converse with Him in mysterious way is found in poetries of both

poets. On one hand Rumi's soul cries "Oh Beloved, take me. Liberate my soul. Fill me with your love" (Rumi, 2004, available at: <http://www.khamush.com/passion.htm> ) and on the other hand Bulleh Shah comes with the new concept of union whereby repeating the name of beloved with love the lover himself changes into beloved.

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